

A journey 15 years in the making: Bedsonline's trip through travel

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The epic journey of Odysseus to return home after the Trojan wars took a mere 10 years. So what do you call a 15 year journey - one quite literally focusing on nothing more than travel itself?

That's how old Bedsonline is this year and we've certainly not been travelling without moving. But the travel landscape has evolved beyond recognition and only by understanding those changes can we truly understand how Bedsonline came into existence and has developed.

Nonetheless, the concept of going on a holiday hasn't really changed in the last 15 years. There's still the aspiration, the need to fund it, planning, book, and travel. Once there, there's the requirement to eat and sleep and the desire to explore. Sights such as the Eiffel Tower, the Colosseum in Rome, or even Disneyland Resort haven't gone out of fashion. And yet subtle and continual shifts have altered the travel experience in some very big ways.

To understand how it all began, however, we need to go back even further. The introduction of the internet turned an entire industry on its head as new brands emerged to take advantage of it. Going backwards in time, in 1996, inspired in part by US carrier Southwest, in Europe easyJet and Ryanair changed the European airline industry forever with their take on the low-cost airline model.

Then in 1999 some companies known as 'metasearchers' appeared on the scene with a different slant on the online travel shopping experience: travel search engines which collected fares from booking sites (agencies, airlines, hotels). In 2000 TripAdvisor was born and it is still by far the biggest social travel site on the web; it was (and still is) incredibly simple - travellers left reviews of hotels, fellow travellers found the reviews and could make a decision on whether to stay at a property based on what they'd read.

Responding to this rapidly changing environment, in 2004 a group of less than ten people within Hotelbeds started an amazing project called Bedsonline. The offering was simple: an intuitive website for travel agencies where they could book any accommodation in just three steps.

Originally Bedsonline was launched for the Spanish market only, focused on those travelling to the Spanish beach resorts. But over time Bedsonline has included more destinations, currently reaching up to 185, and more than 50,000 travel agents from over 100 source markets around the world now make their bookings through the platform. Bedsonline has also included more and more product non-accommodation products and now has 18,000 activities, 24,000 transfers, and +5,000 rent-a-car suppliers on the platform.

Bedsonline's start wasn't as smooth and simple as its subsequent success would indicate. Internet usage wasn't that widespread for travel agencies and most of them still used to send a fax to modify a booking. That was how technology was fifteen years ago!

Nonetheless, after the formula for success was developed in Spain, the company exported the model to the Dominican Republic in 2004, and Portugal, Mexico and Costa Rica in 2005.

Meanwhile, in 2006 Facebook started to become popular and a new concept in the online travel experience began: sharing. Over time travellers turned to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as

platforms to show off where they had been or were planning to go on holiday to their community of friends and followers. One year later Apple announced its iPhone and gave users reliable and easy-to-navigate access to the web via their handsets. This had a huge influence on what became the start of travel services on mobile devices.

Whilst it comes as a surprise to many, here and now in 2019 the travel agency model still persists. In fact there are those who see its digitalisation as an opportunity, not a threat, and their businesses are flourishing. They embrace the belief that it is the responsibility of travel agencies to empower themselves with the best tools of the trade, and communicate their expertise to those considering the *'do it yourself'* (DIY) approach.

The travel agencies of tomorrow must be armed with the most powerful travel management technology available. That's why Bedsonline offers to travel agents globally great benefits to help them to grow: a powerful and user-friendly technology which is a best-in-class search engine, designed specifically for their needs, that allows users to filter and compare results in a flexible and practical way, including intuitive email and PDF functions.

Here's to the journey the travel industry will make over the next 15 years - and the role that Bedsonline will play making sure travel agents get their customers the best hotels, transfers and activities during every step of the trip!

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